

Because we find our native language with us, it may be selfish of us if we do not allow the next generation to receive it from us. Because native language is in our hands, a sense of responsibility calls for us to pass it on.

**Summary of Presentation by Manny Flores Borja, Chamorro from the island of Saipan.
Native Language Track: Moving Toward Immersion
Friday, January 21, 2011**

The Mariana Islands consist of 15 volcanic islands in the northern Pacific Ocean, close to the equator. The southern dead volcanic islands are the populated islands and the northern active volcanic islands are scarcely populated to not inhabited.

The Chamorro language was spoken in the Marianas prior to the European's first contact on March 5, 1521 when Magellan's circumnavigation of the world found him stopping on the southern islands. The 230 years of Spanish presence on the islands (1668-1898) had a great impact on the Chamorro language with many Spanish words finding their way into the Chamorro language. However, the grammar of the Chamorro language remained intact and the Chamorro language survived even as the natives learned to speak the Spanish language. The Chamorro language survived because the parents spoke to their children in Chamorro. *(There are about 62,000 Chamorro speakers now with about 35,000 on Guam, 13,000 in the CNMI, and about 14,000 outside of the Mariana islands, mostly in California, Washington, Texas and Hawaii.)*

In 1815 a group of islanders from the Caroline islands settled on Saipan and since then, on Saipan, there are two native languages, namely Chamorro and Carolinian. *(There are about 5,000 Carolinian speakers, mostly on the island of Saipan.)*

The Chamorro and Carolinian parents continued to speak to their children in their mother tongue up to the 1980s after the Northern Mariana islands became a U.S. Commonwealth territory and the people became U.S. citizens.

In just one generation's time, there is a complete switch from children speaking Chamorro and or Carolinian at home to children speaking American English at home. With this switch came the switch in the purpose of the bilingual education at the schools. For the native islanders attending school after World War II and prior to 1980, they attended school with a firm knowledge of their native language and they learned English only at school because their parents did not speak English. For native islanders attending school from the 1980s on, they attend school speaking English and they have limited to no knowledge of their native language. In this situation, the grandparents cannot communicate with their grandchildren. Native children born from the 1980s on are generally not taught their native language at home because parents do not speak to them in Chamorro or Carolinian.

The purpose of the bilingual education in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), therefore, changed 360 degrees, beginning in the 1980s, from using the native language at the schools to explain the English written academic subject areas (because the learner's language is his native language and not English), to using the native language as a subject area because the learner's language is English and not his native language.

The possible causes for the switch in the 1980's might be the following:

A) The generation that spoke the native language naturally felt that the native language was alive and well because it was alive and well with them, not realizing that by not speaking to their children in their native language, the language would be lost within a generation's time because their children would not be speaking it.

B) The parents' mindful consideration for their children to do well in school and since the medium of instruction at the school is American English, speaking to their children in English would give them a head start. This is in contrast to the experience of the parents who found it difficult to understand the subjects taught in school during their time because they were in English and they had limited knowledge in English.

C) The influence of western culture is hard to ignore when the television programs are all in English, the newspapers are printed in English, the international language is English, among many other strong influences in the immediate environment.

D) The native islanders were not accepting their culture as valuable as other cultures (especially in the presence of the western American culture) and therefore they down played their native culture, and they did not speak as much in their native language to their children.

E) There were not enough support systems to maintain the native language at home, in the community, nor at the schools. For example, the native language is hard to write; the spelling rules are not understood; the native language dictionary is nonexistent or not complete; there is lack of ordinary literature in the native language.

F) The responsibility to make sure that native children learn their native language (and culture) was lost either by the parents or the school community, or was lost by both parents and the school community. (Note the difference between "school" and "school community" because a school can be any school but a school community is a larger concept of the community assisting the school and the school existing for the community.)

G) The parents and the community as a whole have not consciously asked the question of "Why maintain the native language" and therefore they have not come up with a strong answer.

Inasmuch as the immediate/surrounding environment can play a role in the lost of a native language, it, too, can help to revitalize it. For example, in the Marianas, the Chamorro and Carolinian youths are now proudly wearing t-shirts that contain cultural elements including native words, instead of happily wearing Nike shirts. Even the telephone area code for the CNMI which is 670 is now a popular number on t-shirts, giving the youths a sense of belongingness. Moreover, there are now more radio stations playing Chamorro and Carolinian music and speaking the native languages. There is a revival for native culture including the revival in speaking the native languages and the environment supports it, including more and more businesses selling cultural items. An increasing number of young parents are now making sure that their children learn Chamorro or Carolinian, in addition to learning American English. If the parents do not speak the native language, the parents bring their children to the grandparents for the children to learn the language.

The possible causes for the revival in learning the native language might be the following:

A) The parents who had good experience with their native language realize that they ought to accord their children the same experience.

B) As children (who did not learn their native language) went abroad and felt searching for their identity come back to the islands and have children of their own, and realizing the importance of securing one's native culture, they try to make sure that the culture and the language is not lost and is learned by their children.

C) Having experienced the western culture and finding that it did not have all the answers and turning to native culture and finding that it has important and valuable answers is an eye opener. For example, there are certain illnesses that western hospital medicine cannot treat but can be treated by native medicine and the practice of native medicine is now reclaiming its respect as it once had in the older days in the culture.

D) Parents realize that children can learn more than one language well and so they do not neglect one language in favor of the other, e.g., children can learn English and a native language well at the same time.

E) Some members of the community realize the sudden changes happening with regard to native language and an effort is made by them to protect the language before it is totally lost.

F) Parents and the community as a whole have consciously asked themselves the question of "Why maintain the native language" and have come up with a strong answer as to why maintain the native language.

G) The native language orthography rules have been simplified and it is now easier to write in the native language; the availability of a comprehensive native language dictionary is there, and more books are written in the native language.

H) One parent always speaks to the child in the native language and the other parent always speaks to the child in English, especially as the child begins to learn to speak and thus the child grows up speaking English and the native language.

I) The environment offers support in learning the native language and the youths buy into their native culture, together with radio stations and television broadcasting native language music and people speaking in the native language; signs in public buildings and street names have native language words.

J. There are more native language teachers teaching native language because the school system affords to pay the native language teachers competitive salary.

For the question as to "Why maintain the native language," I have the following to offer:

A) Native languages offer unique perspectives on human understandings. A native language used in an environment where coconut trees are part of the community's way of life, for example, would have sufficient ways of describing the many parts of the coconut trees including the names of the different stages in the life of the nut/fruit and the life of the tree itself. Having abundant words relating to a coconut tree offers an abundant way of looking at a coconut tree instead of simply looking at it in a general way as a tree, as a foreign language not having coconuts in its environment would treat it.

B) With native culture comes native language and the stronger the language, the stronger the culture.

C) In some native languages, some words are more powerful than others (some words have their own power) and some words are innately connected to the spiritual realm

D) Some meanings of words in native languages cannot be translated into a foreign language, thus preserving a particular meaning in a language is important. (As a side note, the Navaho language was used during World War II and the Japanese could not decode it at the time. This experience by the code talkers as depicted in the movie “Wind Talkers” happened on the island of Saipan. Fifty years after the war, some of the Navaho Code Talkers came to visit Saipan again. They played a significant role during WWII.)

F) Because we find our native language with us, it may be selfish of us if we do not allow the next generation to receive it from us. Because native language is in our hands, a sense of responsibility calls for us to pass it on.

G) A Mount Everest mountain climber was asked why did he climb Mt. Everest and he answered “Because it is there.” In this same spirit, one can answer the question of “Why maintain the native language” with “Because it is there,” or simply “Why not?”

Whether the CNMI has actually consciously and or officially (with community leaders involvement) asked the question of “Why maintain the native language” or not, it currently has a native language curriculum in its public school system and the program is not called bilingual education but it is a curriculum called the Chamorro and Carolinian Language Heritage Studies (CCLH) with the following Standards and Benchmarks:

Standard 1: Interpersonal Oral Communication — Students use Chamorro or Carolinian to engage in conversations, express feelings and emotions, demonstrate culturally acceptable behavior, and exchange opinions and information.

Standard 2: Academic Oral Communication — Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners on a variety of academic topics.

Standard 3: Reading — Students engage in the Chamorro or Carolinian reading process.

Standard 4: Writing — Students demonstrate writing skills in Chamorro or Carolinian.

Standard 5: Cultural Values — Students apply and demonstrate knowledge of traditional and contemporary cultural values.

Whereas CCLH does not include grades 9-12, the CNMI Board of Education is working to make it to be for grades 1-12.

All in all, in the maintenance of native language, the most important and the strongest factor is the parents. When parents do not speak their native language to their children, the native language is weakened and may die and the schools will always have the challenge of trying to be as good a language teacher as the parents are. When parents speak the native language to their children and the child finds his native language and culture honored and respected at school, this child finds herself/himself living in a culture that is protected, unthreatened, and in harmony with the outside world and other cultures, with the native language being freely maintained. In this environment, the child is attending a school that exists for the community, with the community and the school having a natural “immersion program.”





Manny's Chicken *Kelaguen* Recipe

Separate the quarter legs and the wings from the whole chicken. Cut the remaining chicken into halves. Broil or barbeque the pieces of chicken but do not put barbeque sauce. You may add the gizzard but not the liver. Put some salt and pepper on both sides of the chicken parts and broil or barbeque.

Do not overcook the chicken.

Debone the chicken and cut the meat into small pieces.

Squeeze four large lemons or large limes into the cut-up chicken. You have to be able to taste the lemon in the chicken. If using lemon powder, put two to four tablespoons of lemon powder.

You may combine two fresh large lemons and two tablespoons of lemon powder.

Add salt to taste.

Chop, finely, one or two stalks of fresh green onions and add to the chicken mix.

The *kelaguen* is ready to be served. However:

You may add some chopped-up hot peppers to the mix.

You may add freshly grated coconut flakes (from one-half to one whole coconut) to the mix.

You may add a generous tablespoon of finely chopped fresh ginger to the mix.

You may add about a half cup of chopped celery to the mix.

(A traditional Chamorro chicken kelaguen has chicken, fresh lemon or lime juice, green onion, salt, chopped hot pepper, and freshly grated coconut. You may eat the kelaguen as an appetizer or with rice, sweet potato, corn, tapioca, taro, yam, breadfruit, or cooked banana, or you may wrap the kelaguen in a wheat flour wrap or in a corn flour wrap or tortilla.)

Manny's Eggplant with Coconut Milk Salad Recipe

With a fork, poke the eggplant four to ten different places so that when put over fire, the eggplant will not explode.

Prepare at least four long eggplants.

Place eggplant over burning charcoal, or even on top of an electric range/stove and let most of the skin or even all of the skin to burn.

You may place the whole eggplant (with the skin burned) in a bowl of water to cool and for easy peeling.

When the eggplants are all cooked (skin burn), peel off the burned skin, letting a few small pieces of burned skin to remain on the eggplant. Leave the stem together with the eggplant.

Place the whole peeled eggplant with stem flat in a bowl.

For four eggplants, squeeze at least one large lemon or lime over the eggplant in the bowl.

You have to taste the lemon or lime in the eggplant.

Add salt to taste.

Add finely chopped green onions (from one stalk) over the eggplant.

For four eggplants, grate one to two coconuts and squeeze the grated coconuts in your hands for the milk to come out and pour the milk over the eggplant. Do not add water to the grated coconut before you squeeze the milk out it. The coconut milk to be added must be 100% from the freshly grated coconut(s).

Serve the eggplant salad.

Maila' ta fañochu/Come and let's eat!